

Throughout the basin it is evident there has been a changing environment over the last century through population growth and irrigation schemes designed to feed the nation and provide income and employment.

If climate change has also played a role then it has happened gradually and should not all be attributed to the last decade which has been almost all drought.

We need to give proper value to the basin's irrigation development and recognise not only the economic and social benefits but also the magnitude of diverse flora and fauna that have flourished where previously it could not exist. We need to give recognition and appreciation to this new environmental asset that has been created.

Without doubt we need to have a sustainable environment throughout the basin and to achieve this it is necessary to allocate priorities on the use of all available water.

The surprising feature of the current debate is an almost total lack of consideration for additional development of water storage or diversions from areas with an abundance of surplus water. It appears these considerations are too long term or politically sensitive for any of our governments to seriously pursue. Even with the massive widespread flooding that is now occurring there is an absence of ideas on how this water can be stored for future environmental or irrigation use.

Some serious and realistic consideration needs to be given on the following issues:

1. Maximising the use of irrigation water through improved efficiency, thereby increasing irrigation productivity, rather than reducing the amount of water diverted for this purpose. This alone would take care of all the social and economic uncertainty currently worrying everyone in the farming communities.
2. Allocate environmental water to areas dedicated for permanent sustainability. This would involve putting some areas into a category of secondary importance. As an example Lake Alexandrina and Lake Menindee could be partitioned so that a small part could be kept fully supplied with water whilst the balance would get water periodically according to availability. This would produce a massive saving of water through reduced evaporation as has already happened at Barren Box Swamp in the M.I.A.
3. Serious consideration should be given to opening the Koorong Lakes to ocean water - as it was originally.
4. It is necessary to audit all forest and wetland assets and give some priority to those that really need to be maintained in a pristine condition. It is totally unrealistic to claim that all have to be given priority over other water users.
5. The changes in the basin have occurred over at least a century. It is totally unrealistic to think that it can all be reversed in a few years, or a parliamentary term.
6. We need to look at a 50+ year plan to use the water available in the northern areas and bring it south. This could lead to opportunities to engage new migrants and refugees in new communities developed along the channel system to be built over the decades to come.

PHIL HANCOCK
C.E.O SOUTH PACIFIC SEEDS PTY. LTD.